

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00  
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01  
INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 HA-05 /079 W  
-----007418 281839Z /43

O R 281735Z SEP 78  
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2728  
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE  
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM  
AMEMBASSY GABORONE  
AMEMBASSY LAGOS  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA  
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO  
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA  
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRETORIA 5770

USUN PLEASE PASS TO AMBASSADOR EDMONDSON

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PORG, SF, WA  
SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF P.W. BOTHA'S SELECTION  
AS PRIME MINISTER

BEGIN SUMMARY:

P.W. BOTHA'S ELECTION AS THE NEW PRIME MINISTER OF SOUTH  
AFRICA WILL LIKELY MAKE THE SAG MORE UNPREDICTABLE IN FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS THAN IN THE PAST. THE ODDS ARE HIGH, HOWEVER, THAT HE  
WILL TAKE A HARD LINE ON NAMIBIA, BELIEVING THAT IF SOUTH  
AFRICA PREVAILS IN THIS CONFRONTATION WITH THE WORLD, IT COULD  
HAVE BROAD BENEFITS FOR SOUTH AFRICA BY MAKING CRYSTAL CLEAR THE  
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EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS DETERMINATION. ON DOMESTIC MATTERS, HE  
IS LIABLE TO TAKE AN UNCOMPROMISING LINE ON SUPPRESSION OF  
BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENTS AND OTHER DISSIDENT  
ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS PERCEIVED AS SUBVERSIVE. AT THE  
SAME TIME, VERLIGTES IN THE PARTY BELIEVE THAT SUCH IS THE  
STRENGTH OF HIS CONSERVATIVE REPUTATION HE COULD ADOPT  
RELATIVELY BOLD MOVES TOWARD DISMANTLING DISCRIMINATION AND

DEVELOPING NEW POLITICAL DISPENSATIONS FOR THE BLACK POPULATION. PIK BOTHA WAS THE KING MAKER, THROWING 20 OF HIS 22 FIRST BALLOT VOTES TO PW. PIK WILL LIKELY REMAIN AS FOREIGN MINISTER BUT THE NATURE AND DURABILITY OF HIS RELATIONSHIP TO P.W. REMAIN TO BE TESTED. END SUMMARY.

1. ONE IMMEDIATE SPECULATION OF MANY OBSERVERS IS THAT P.W. BOTHA'S ADMINISTRATION MAY POSSIBLY BE A RELATIVELY SHORT ONE. WE WOULD BE HESITANT ABOUT JUMPING TO THAT CONCLUSION. ALTHOUGH HE IS ONE YEAR OLDER THAN VORSTER, P.W. IS IN APPARENT GOOD HEALTH AND COULD CONTINUE IN OFFICE FOR MANY YEARS. PERHAPS MORE PROBABLE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS STEPPING UP TO THE EXECUTIVE STATE PRESIDENCY UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION ONE OR TWO YEARS HENCE SHOULD VORSTER'S PHYSICAL OR POLITICAL POWERS WEKEN AND BRING ABOUT HIS RETIREMENT.

2. AS THE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE REACHED ITS CULMINATION, ONE INCREASINGLY HEARD SPECULATION WAS THAT FOREIGN MINISTER PIK BOTHA WOULD STRIKE A DEAL WITH P.W. AND THROW HIS SUPPORT TO THE DEFENSE MINISTER. PIK WAS IN FACT THE KING-MAKER SWINGING 20 OF HIS 22 FIRST BALLOT VOTES TO PW TO BREAK THE FIRST BALLOT TIE BETWEEN PW AND CONNIE MULDER. THE EXTENT AND THE NATURE OF ANY PW-PIK DEAL IS HIGHLY UNCERTAIN. POSSIBLY PW'S ONLY FIRM COMMITMENT WAS TO RETAIN PIK AS FOREIGN MINISTER. PIK'S POPULAR SUPPORT WAS DRAMATIZED DURING THE CAMPAIGN BUT THE RESULTS SHOWED THE CURRENT LIMITS OF HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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PROSPECTS FOR EXPANDING HIS POWER BASE WITHIN THE STRONGLY CONSERVATIVE-MINDED PARTY CAUCUS. SOME OBSERVERS HAVE SPECULATED, HOWEVER THAT THE P.W.-PIK WORKING PARTNERSHIP WILL BE A TENUOUS ONE SUBJECT TO SHARP DIVISIONS OVER RASH DECISIONS BY THE NEW PRIME MINISTER.

3. THE IMMEDIATE REACTION AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN BLACKS WILL CERTAINLY BE THAT THE MOST UNCONCILIATORY, HARD-LINE CANDIDATE HAS ASSUMED LEADERSHIP. BLACK MILITANTS WILLING TO MAKE ANY DISTINCTION BETWEEN NATIONALIST LEADERS HAVE SAID THAT THEY WOULD PREFER P.W. AS HE WOULD PUT THE LEAST FAVORABLE FACE ON APARTHEID AND THEREBY HASTEN "THE REVOLUTION." CERTAINLY, WE CAN EXPECT A FIRM REITERATION OF THE NATIONAL PARTY POLICY OF SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT. BUT WITHIN THIS DECLARED POLICY, MANY NATIONALIST VERLIGTES BELIEVE, P.W. COULD CONCEIVABLY PROVE TO BE MORE ABLE POLITICALLY THAN PIK AND MORE WILLING IDEOLOGICALLY THAN MULDER TO MAKE BOLD CHANGES AFFECTING BLACKS. OTHER OBSERVERS POINT TO THE RELATIVE PROGRESSIVE MOVES ON RACE RELATIONS P.W. HAS MADE IN THE MILITARY IN THIS REGARD. ONE NEAR-TERM TEST WILL BE HIS CABINET APPOINTMENTS, PARTICULARLY IN "PLURAL RELATIONS" AND THE EVENTUAL SHAPE OF THE PROPOSED NEW CONSTITUTION AIMED AT GIVING A VOICE IN

NATIONAL AFFAIRS TO COLOREDS AND INDIANS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PRETORIA 5770

USUN PLEASE PASS TO AMBASSADOR EDMONDSON

4. IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, P.W. WILL LIKELY BE MORE UNPREDICTABLE THAN HIS PREDECESSOR. WITH THE DEPARTURE OF THE DOUR AND PRAGMATIC VORSTER, SAG POLICY MAY BE SUBJECT TO FIERY OUTBURSTS FROM A VOLATILE, HOT-TEMPERED PRIME MINISTER. IT IS POSSIBLE OF OURSE THAT P.W. WILL MELLOW UNDER HIS NEW RESPONSIBILITY. WHILE HIS BASIC FOREIGN POLICY WILL PROBABLY BE HARD-HEADED AND PRAGMATIC, NATIONALIST INTELLECTUALS FEAR ILL-CONCEIVED HAIR-TRIGGER REACTIONS TO CRISIS SITUATIONS.

5. NAMIBIA IS THE IMMEDIATE FOREIGN POLICY QUESTION WHICH MAY PROVIDE A PRELIMINARY VIEW OF P.W.'S POSTURE IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA. ACCORDING TO SOURCES IN WINDHOEK, AKTUR HAS BEEN "PRAYING" FOR P.W.'S SELECTION. THE NEW PRIME MINISTER  
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IS REPORTEDLY A CLOSE FRIEND OF LEADING NATIONALISTS IN SOUTH WEST, INCLUDING DU PLESSIS AND JANNIE DE WET. P.W., OF COURSE, REPUTEDLY LED THE CABINET GROUP OVER THE PAST YEAR WHICH TOOK A TOUGH POSITION ON THE WESTERN PROPOSAL AND WHICH SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY AFFORDED BY VORSTER'S FAILING HEALTH AND RESIGNATION AND BY REACTIONS TO SUCH VIOLENT EVENTS AS THE VISCOUNT INCIDENT AND THE CAPRIVI ATTACK TO ASSURE REJECTION OF THE WALDHEIM REPORT. THE VERY STRENGTH OF P.W.'S OPPOSITION TO THE REPORT WOULD THEORETICALLY GIVE HIM MORE POLITICAL FLEXIBILITY IN REVERSING COURSE SHOULD HE BE INCLINED TO DO SO. BUT THE ASSUMPTION AT THIS POINT MUST BE THAT HE HAS NO SUCH INCLINATION, AND THAT HE WILL GIVE HIGHEST PRIORITY TO KEEPING NAMIBIA OUT OF SWAPO CONTROL. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT P.W. CALCULATES THAT IF SOUTH AFRICA PREVAILS IN THE CONFRONTATION OVER NAMIBIA, THIS COULD HAVE POSITIVE BENEFITS FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S DOMESTIC AS WELL AS FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

6. P.W., ON THE OTHER HAND, APPARENTLY HAS LITTLE LOVE FOR THE RHODESIANS AND IS AMONG THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT IAN SMITH HAS BROUGHT HIS TROUBLES ON HIMSELF BY ACCEPTING THE PRINCIPLE OF POWER-SHARING IN THE FIRST PLACE AND THEN REFUSING TO CARRY THROUGH WITH IT. WE IMAGINE THAT P.W. WILL BE HARD-HEADED RATHER THAN HARD-NOSED ABOUT RHODESIA. GENERALLY, WE CAN EXPECT P.W. TO STRESS EVEN MORE THAN THE VORSTER ADMINISTRATION THE NEED FOR SOUTH AFRICA TO STRENGTHEN ITS DEFENSE CAPABILITY AND NATIONAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND STAND UP TO WORLD PRESSURES, AS HE INDICATED HE WOULD IN HIS FIRST REMARKS TODAY AS PRIME MINISTER. (PRETORIA 5767).  
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